

Cultural Heritage, Cultural Identity, Cultural Branding

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to reflect upon the concept of cultural branding that may be applied to Romanian traditional customs and habits. One representative ritual is the offering of traditional March amulets to friends and family, which could be analysed as a cultural practice. This practice could be examined as an important element of both identity and national brand. Furthermore, our approach intends to study the potential of cultural heritage-based brands.

Keywords: *cultural heritage, cultural branding, identity, alterity*

1. Introduction

The brand concept has become a very important aspect studied by social sciences. The concept itself managed to evade from the traditional marketing constraints and to put into value many social and cultural resources – objects and habits, from both material and immaterial perspectives. The quality of such resources has had a significant contribution to innovation, brand valorization in time and also creativity. The evolution of demand has involved the continuous improvement of the quality of products and services.

Even though it is hard to rigorously define the concept of brand, new elements appear every single day, making the analysis more and more challenging. One might find it very hard to distinguish between the idea of brand and the product itself. However, the logo, name, drawing or any particular combination of these lead the customers to actually purchase a product of services, associating the

brand with a certain level of quality, prestige or a certain degree of satisfaction.

The concept of brand refers to that “product, service, organization, person that/who transmits a feeling of satisfaction and soul satisfaction and for which the consumer cannot find a substitute” and that “appeals to the residing emotional springs in the mind of each customer, influencing positively or negatively any decision on any level ” (Cărămidă 2009: 48, in State 2016: 320) .

The analysis of the brand points towards the following assumptions: differentiation (the brand is the distinguishing sign in relation to the competition), innovation (the brand must bring something new - the competitive advantage), creativity (the brand must be creative), uniqueness (the brand must be positioned in a unique way, occupying a special place in the consumer's mind), interest/attraction (the brand must attract, as consumers decide whether the brand will be successful or not), context (the brand must relate to the situational context).

The brands evolve and become more powerful as time passes by, due to the creation of their own market identity, permanently responding to the consumer needs and, consequently, to the market demand. The brand should be unique and differentiate the product and service from the competition. The costumers perceive the value of the product due to the brand name and identity, being ready to make an additional financial effort in order to sustain the quality of products.

2. Cultural branding axioms in the contemporary society

Holt (2004) identified a set of axioms regarding cultural branding. The branding strategies have been defined based on these axioms in order to succeed in the advertising process.

One axiom takes into consideration branding as addressing society's needs, wishes or concerns. The way branding campaigns act

suggests that they understand the common wishes and desires of particular groups and pretend to respond to their demands.

Another fact is that branding and advertising make use of aspirational figures, such as well-known athletes or artists in order to inspire the consumers to identify themselves with them through the same consumption habits.

Consumers have the impression of having overcome their frustrations or lack of accomplishments while being faced to identity myths.

The advertising specialists promote imaginary worlds to consumers, as ideal solutions for escaping from their daily frustrations and boredom. The usual consumers tend to identify themselves with the famous person who promotes the product or service on sale.

Branding campaigns act like “activists”, inspiring consumers to think about themselves in a different manner, but far away from reality. They try to make people reconsider the ideas about themselves by myths that are associated with the wishes of people. Often, people report that the quality of a certain product has increased, while the quality of the product is the same, but the impression is different because of a well-crafted myth residing in the branding campaign.

3. Cultural branding vs nation branding

Olins (2010) shows the importance of national brand in building the identity of a country, both in the case of the “old” nations, such as USA or France, and in the newer states that appeared on the world map after the fall of communism, mainly focusing on the countries of the former Soviet Union, of former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia or on those less known worldwide, the Eastern European states.

All these nations are not very well-known to the world, “each of these new or newly reinvented nations is intensely experiencing its own nationality, personality, strengths, weaknesses and cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and commercial heritage”, but viewed from

the outside, they are merely “a grey amalgam, undifferentiated and foreign” (*Ibidem*: 136).

Although the USA is not concerned with building a country brand, some of its symbols are very striking in the public consciousness. First, the United States is the expression of democracy, freedom, and the Statue of Liberty is the symbol of this important American value. Another element that the US identifies with is technology (Silicon Valley, Microsoft, NASA, etc.). Finally, a last iconic element for the US is the pop culture - ‘seductive’ adverts that undermine the national cultures of others: fast food (McDonald's, Coca-Cola), sport clothing (Nike), entertainment (most of Hollywood products). So, all of these elements build an image of the United States that is easily recognizable all over the world.

National branding is an important instrument in building national identity and recognizing it by other states. France is an important example in this regard, the political regimes under its leadership have been concerned with the creation and consolidation of the French political identity, with affirming France's position within the European context. We will give as an example one of these moments. With the French Revolution, important changes took place within the French society (the dramatic transition from the monarchy to the republic), which led to a rebranding process, by changing the metric system, the calendar, the anthem (the new anthem became *La Marseillaise*). All of these have come to be known and have an influence in Europe and throughout the world.

Another example presented by Wally Olins is Spain, the great power of the world which has gone through a rebranding process, after a dark period of its history, marked by the civil war of 1930, of poverty, of authoritarianism under Franco's government. After 1975, it went through an extensive process of modernization and national change, which rehabilitated and revitalized Spain both for its citizens and for the whole world. The solar symbol of Juan Miro was the emblem under which this Spanish “Reconquista” took place, marked

by the tourist expansion, by the flashing economic evolution, by the reconstruction of cities like Barcelona and Bilbao, by world-wide events like the Barcelona Olympic Games and Seville International Exhibition of 1992. Great creators were involved in this process, the film director Pedro Almodovar and the architect Santiago Calatrava, their works contributing to change the perception regarding the Spanish nation.

Cheregi (2017) analyses the nation's branding campaigns in post-communist Romania. In the case of Romania, after the Revolution of 1989, there has been a confrontation between two sides, on the one side, there was the national identity in communism and on the other side, the national identity in post-communism. Those branding campaigns, Romania Simply Surprising (2004), Romania Land of Choice (2009), Explore the Carpathian Garden (2010), and Discover the Place Where You Feel Reborn (2014), have created specific "semiospheres" by means of national myths and cultural symbols.

In this case, nation branding campaigns function as a semiosis, understood as a process of translation. The question that arises here is whether there is communication between the nation brand and the audience outside of the semiotic space. Certainly, nation branding campaigns use translation mechanisms in order to position a nation internationally. (Cheregi 2017: 23).

4. Intangible cultural heritage as cultural branding

Cultural heritage represents an important element for the "brandosphere" (Rossolatos 2014). From the cultural semiotic perspective, the meaning is a collective creation, a dynamic system, a "semiospheric whole with distinctive spheres, each of which vies for a increase in 'mindshare'", "sphere's 'share-of-cultural-representations' among the recipients and co-creators of the units that make up individual cultural spheres" (*Ibidem*: 28).

Hakala et al. consider cultural heritage as a social construction, “a composite of the history and the coherence and continuity of the nation’s distinguishable characteristics” (2011: 450). Two dimensions are proposed for evaluating and comparing the cultural heritage in the field of brand heritage: homogeneity and endurance (see figure 1).

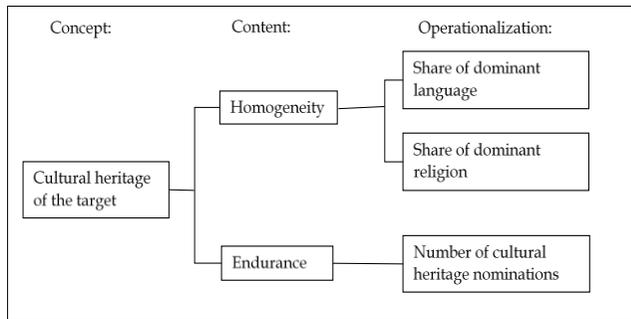


Figure 1. *The operationalisation of cultural heritage (Hakala et al. 2011: 451)*

Homogeneity is founded on “the dominance of a single language, ethnic background and religion within a country”. Regarding the endurance, Hakala et al. consider that the Unesco World Heritage Lists provide reliable politically neutral data on both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Traditions, rituals, cultural practices represent the legacy from the past, from the ancestors.

Romania inscribed seven elements on Unesco’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage; the most recent is represented by the Cultural practices associated to the 1st of March (see table 1).

2017	Cultural practices associated to the 1st of March
2016	Traditional wall-carpet craftsmanship in Romania and the Republic of Moldova
2015	Lad’s dances in Romania
2013	Men’s group Colindat, Christmas-time ritual
2012	Craftsmanship of Horezu ceramics
2009	Doina

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2008	Căluș ritual
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Table 1. Romania – elements on the Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage¹

Cultural Practices Associated to the 1st of March comprise traditions transmitted since ancient times to celebrate the beginning of spring. The main practice consists of making, offering and wearing a red and white thread, which is then untied when the first blossom tree, swallow or stork is seen. A few other local practices also form part of a larger spring celebration, such as purification actions in Moldova. The artefact is considered to provide symbolic protection against perils such as capricious weather, with the practice ensuring a safe passage from winter to spring for individuals, groups and communities.²

Conclusions

We consider that these intangible cultural heritage elements could participate in the construction of national cultural brands.

Cultural heritage items, such as Mărțișor, are identified as belonging to practices that support social cohesion, intergenerational exchange and interaction between members of communities and visitors from the country and from abroad. In this way, cultural heritage items comprised in a brand may promote internationally the traditional culture without mediation or translation.

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¹ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/romania-RO?info=elements-on-the-lists>

² <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/cultural-practices-associated-to-the-1st-of-march-01287>.

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